



Session update from Olympia

April 11, 2011

Dear neighbors,

Greetings from Olympia! Now into the 13th week of the 2011 legislative session, the pace has quickened from a jog to a run. With approximately only two weeks left until the Legislature is scheduled to adjourn *sine die*, bills continue to move through both chambers at a very quick pace.

Demonstrations on Capitol campus

While bills continue to move quickly, the debate around them got much louder this week as thousands of protestors travelled to our state capital to demonstrate against the “all cuts” budget proposed by the House of Representatives.

While each day of demonstrations symbolized the frustration felt statewide, those speaking came from backgrounds as diverse as Washington State itself.

On Wednesday, a group of demonstrators spent the night on the marble floor of the Capitol Rotunda. Many Wednesday evening were students protesting cuts to our higher education system. One, who I spoke to, would be forced to abandon his education should the work-study

Contact Information:

Olympia Office:
215 John A. Cherberg Building
PO Box 40440 Olympia, WA 98504

Phone: (360) 786-7678

Toll-free legislative hotline:
1-800-562-6000

TTY/TDD Hearing impaired
hotline: 1-800-635-9993

E-mail: kevin.ranker@leg.wa.gov

Web site:
<http://senatedemocrats.wa.gov/senators/ranker>

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program be eliminated. Another told me of her struggle trying to balance her education and career while being a loving, attentive single mother.

Thursday saw heightened levels of frustration from demonstrators. About 500 healthcare workers marched on the Capitol, fighting against proposed cuts to home and long-term care hours among a host of other issues. This frustration bled over into the public viewing area of the House and into the Governor's Office.

Unfortunately, in the heat of action, emotions flow differently and events escalated until the Washington State Patrol had to step in cool down the demonstration.

Friday marked the culmination of the demonstrations, as more than 7,000 Washingtonians converged upon Olympia to voice their frustration. From firefighters to elementary school teachers, they represented working families across the state – all fighting for their and their children's future.

I would like to congratulate the demonstrators on their successful efforts last week and their ability to maintain a civil dialogue. There was no unrest or destruction of any kind – there was civil, Democratic demonstration. This is a sticking point not seen in other states around the country.

I would also extend my gratitude to the Washington State Patrol for keeping peace and order throughout the week. They exercised both precaution and restraint. Through their solid judgment, we had a week of safe demonstrations.

Remember to check out the Senate Democrats' [podcast](#) "In the Loop" for a summary of the week's events or visit us on twitter [@WASenDemocrats](#). A tip for twitter users, follow [#waleg](#) to see what other people are saying about the Washington State Legislature!

BUDGET RESOURCES

[Budget Calculator: Try your hand at balancing the state budget!](#)

[Budget Information](#)

[Citizen's Guide to the Budget](#)

[Legislative Guide to Washington State Property Taxes](#)

[Citizen's Guide to K-12 Finance](#)

[The Great Recession and its Impact on the State Budget](#)



Shaking hands with demonstrators on the Capitol grounds last week.

Message received

With each day of protests, the chant grew louder and louder and the message clearer and clearer. "This is our House!" They said.

They're right - it is.

Our Nation is only as strong as those who shape it and I believe this week's protests were a powerful example of democracy.

I believe that it is important for the public to be heard, just as they were earlier in the year when the tea party held rallies on the capital campus. I believe strongly that all Washingtonians deserve to exercise their first amendment rights as long as they are civil and respectful.

To those who came to Olympia shouting to be heard, here is my response – message received.

Legislative Progress

I am very pleased that over the past week, several of my proposals have made significant progress in the legislative process.

[Senate Bill 5083](#) passed out of the House early last week. This bill streamlines and re-evaluates how certain businesses pay business and occupation (B&O) taxes. Currently, real estate firms that participate in joint transactions each have to forfeit the same portion of their commission to the state for B&O tax. In some cases, this has led to double taxation for firms.

This bill clarifies that the basis for determining the B&O tax for real estate firms is the commission amount received by each real estate firm involved in the transaction, as opposed to the accumulative commission. The result is a fair tax rate for businesses struggling to recover and find strong financial footing after the Great Recession.

[Senate Bill 5451](#) also was voted out of the House of Representatives. This bill protects homeowners along shorelines who are increasingly finding themselves subject to policies hindering their ability to acquire insurance or sell their homes. This bill fixes this by changing those homes that were built legally from “non-conforming” to “conforming” ensuring that families will be able to insure and sell their homes without the difficulties that have arisen in recent years.

[House Bill 1186](#), the companion to my proposal, passed out of the State Senate yesterday. This bill is a huge win for Washington. The legislation takes lessons learned from the tragic spill in the Gulf just one year ago and applies them to Washington’s own Oil Spill Preparedness Program. By strengthening response techniques, prevention tactics, and liability requirements for those who do spill, this bill leaves Washington on a strong footing, ready and on guard to combat future spills.

[Senate Bill 5436](#), a proposal to make Washington State the first in the country to ban copper paint on boat bottoms, passed the House as well. Copper paint has been used to protect boat bottoms for decades, but recent studies have shown that the consequences of this practice handily outweigh its benefits. The copper leached into Puget Sound can affect salmon, shellfish and the overall health of our aquatic ecosystem. With many price equivalent options on the market that do not utilize copper, the time has come to make the change that our Sound demands.

As an avid recreational boater and fisherman I worked hard to make sure this bill was realistic. In the end, by working with our marine manufactures, local boat yards and national paint industries, I believe that we have a bill that will truly make a difference and will be implemented in a realistic timeline.

[Senate Bill 5688](#) also passed the House of Representatives. This would eliminate shark fin trafficking in Washington State. Populations of many shark species have fallen by over 90%. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization conservatively estimates that 856,000 tons of shark and their cousins, rays and skates, were caught in 2003. That is triple the quantity 50 years before, as shark fin soup has caught on as an Asian status symbol. As this status continues to rise – so too does the price and thusly the demand. Shark populations up and down the west coast have been decimated as a result. Without this legislation, shark communities will only continue to shrink until they become endangered or extinct.

[Senate Bill 5230](#), a green jobs bill to establish the Puget Sound corps, passed as well and is currently awaiting the Governor's signature. This proposal stands to consolidate and enhance the current Washington Conservation Corps Program (WCC), creating approximately 150 green collar jobs for young adults and veterans.

Cutting across silos between agencies, the legislation consolidates four duplicative programs into one without fiscal impact. Not only does it

create green collar jobs for veterans and young people, it also provides them training so they can keep working long after the program expires.

Another priority I'm fighting for is the secure financial footing of Washington State Ferries. Operation efficiencies, performance measures with consequences for not meeting our goals, and new ferry construction funding have all moved forward. Already we have achieved support from our fellow legislators for banking half the funding needed for a 144-car vessel beginning next year. Members of other ferry districts and I are currently working hard to identify the additional funding necessary.

While the current level of service is not acceptable, we are also hard at work finding solutions to offset any proposed cuts to service. With some progress already made, we are near to stopping the decade long erosion of service.

Senate Budget Proposal

The Senate budgets are scheduled to be released Tuesday. Though there will be differences between the House and Senate budgets, the expectation is that they will have much more in common than not.

The challenge of writing the 2011-13 biennial budget is enormous because there are no federal funds and no new revenue sources to draw from.

Vital and valued services will be cut. Many of these are public services that are most important to our communities – like public education, public safety and health care.

I will remain defensive in protecting these critical public services. We are not just morally inclined to do this - we are fiscally obliged to do so as well. When education funding erodes, so do our children's test scores. The result is a less competitive economy down the road. When we take away preventative care for families, they are forced to go to the emergency room for primary care. This is expensive to the taxpayer, dissatisfying to

the patient, and burdensome to others seeking immediate necessary care. When we discontinue environmental programs, we run the risk of augmenting environmental degradation and dismantling the green economy jobs of tomorrow.

After the budget is released, we begin negotiating all three of the state budgets (Capital, Operating, and Transportation). As these discussions continue, I will work with my colleagues to pass a cohesive budget that maintains a basic level of service. Understand, there will be significant cuts – and for many families they will be severe, and unfortunately necessary in these hard economic times – but it is my hope that they will also be responsible and thoughtful. Know that I will continue to do everything in my power to protect the programs most important to our communities.

Keep in touch

With these talks and negotiations in mind, the last two weeks of the 2011 legislative session will be two of the most important and the most challenging. As these final days unfold, I will be in constant communication providing updates along the way.

If you ever have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

As always, it is truly an honor to serve you.

And remember...

IT'S YOUR HOUSE!